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STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

VILNIAUS GEDIMINO TECHNIKOS UNIVERSITETO VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT OF VILNIUS GEDIMINAS TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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  Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

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ABBREVIATIONS

BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
EDS	European Diploma Supplement
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ERA	European Research Area
ESG	*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, 3rd edition (2009)
ESN	Erasmus Support Network
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
ET 2020	Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training
EU	European Union
Habil. Dr.	*Doctor Habilitus*
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institute
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LQF	Lithuanian Qualifications Framework
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QA	Quality Assurance
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SKVC	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
TQM	Total Quality Management
VGTU	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University

I. INTRODUCTION

1.   The review of the VILNIUS GEDIMINAS TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY (VGTU) (referred to below as "VGTU" or "the University") was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania, in its role as the Authorized Agency prescribed by Lithuanian law. The review was conducted in accordance with the methodology set out in the Procedure for the External Review in Higher Education approved by Government Resolution No. 1317 on 22nd September, 2010.

2.   The University submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of 70 pages with 16 Annexes, and also further documentation as requested by the review team. The Report of Lithuania's Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) which considered VGTU's learning resources was also referred to in the review. References to all these sets of documentation are made in this report. The review team visited the University from 3rd - 5th December 2013 and conducted meetings with representatives of all relevant bodies of the University, including students, alumni and external stakeholders. During the visit the review team sought to triangulate information provided in the documentation at the meetings with the different university constituencies. Information referred to herein has been verified.

3.   The review team explored the four principal areas of the University's activity as set out in the "Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education" (referred to below as "the Methodology"): strategic planning and management, academic studies and life-long learning, research and art activities, and impact on regional and national development. Within each area of activity the review team referred to the criteria set out in the Methodology and took due account of the associated sub-criteria in reaching the decision.

4.   The review team consisted of team leader *Professor Jethro Newton*, Professor Emeritus University of Chester, former Dean of Academic Quality and Enhancement, University of Chester, UK; and members *Professor Olav Aarna*, Member of the Management Board of Estonian Qualifications Authority and member of European Foundation for Management Development EPAS Accreditation Board, Professor Emeritus and former Rector of Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia; *Professor Anne-Marie Jolly*, Professor Emeritus in process control at University of Orléans, former Dean of Polytech Orléans, member of the cabinet of CDEFI (Official Conference of the Deans of the French Universities of Engineering in Paris), member and member of the board of CTI (accreditation agency for Engineering Diploma), France; *Professor Winfried Mueller*, Professor Emeritus University of Klagenfurt, and Former Rector of the University of Klagenfurt, Austria; *Mr Vaidas Repečka*, Director, JSC Minatech, Lithuania; and *Ms Monika Simaškaitė*, student of the first cycle Export Engineering study programme, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania; and review secretary *Dr Tara Ryan*, Educational Partnerships and Student Services Manager, Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Ireland.

5.   The review team made a number of general and overarching observations which frame the detail of the report.
   ➢ All staff members of the University were open in discussion and dialogue with the review panel regarding the University's organisational arrangements, institutional practices, and current and future challenges.
   ➢ There is a good atmosphere amongst staff (administrative and academic) and students.
   ➢ Students and alumni spoke positively about their experience at the University and showed great loyalty.
   ➢ Staff displayed awareness of the national and regional challenges and a willingness to address them.
   ➢ The University is very considerate of students, and the Careers Office enables VGTU to pay close attention to students' future careers and employability.

- The University is responding well to the requirements of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, 3rd edition (2009) (*ESG*) on information systems (Part One, 1.6) and on public information (Part One, 1.7). Good progress is being made in establishing an integrated IT system and the VGTU website provides good information to the public, including detailed information on programmes.
- The University has now identified a workable approach to quality, assisted by the work of the Quality Management Office and the quality team.
- Mobility opportunities are made available for staff and students and the benefits are evident.
- A good range and variety of external links and long-standing relationships with social partners reflects the priority given to the regional dimension.
- There is good student involvement and representation in the various levels of University structures.

However, the review team notes that:

- The SER did not fully do the University justice. The process included good staff and student representation, and it assisted organisational learning, but there is a need to improve self-evaluation skills. There is scope to strengthen the capability for self-critical analysis, for clearly projecting the achievements and strengths of VGTU, and also, **all** of the challenges and issues facing the University.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

6. The University is a state higher education institution which is focussed on technology. It was originally established as a branch campus of Kaunas Polytechnic Institute in 1956. Subsequently it was reorganised into Vilnius Civil Engineering Institute in 1969, becoming, Vilnius Technical University in 1990, and finally being retitled Vilnius Gediminas Technical University in 1996, after the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Gediminas (c.1275 – 1341).

7. The University has nine Faculties and the Aviation Institute[1]. It is governed collegially through the structure of a Council and Senate with a Chief Executive Officer in the post of Rector who is supported through a Rectorate. Each Faculty consisting of Departments, study and research laboratories, and other units is headed by a Dean. The University views the most important unit for organising higher education and research as the Department. Departments have the remit to independently pursue the goals of research and studies defined for them by the Senate and the Faculty Council, and operate with significant autonomy (Appendix 13 of SER).

8. In 2011, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania approved a new VGTU Statute and the University was reorganised from a state-funded institution into a public institution under Statute XI-1277, as amended by Statute XI-2150 in June 2012. As yet this status does not provide for universities to dispose of their own property with autonomy.

9. Students attend higher education programmes across the three Bologna cycles, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate.

10. As at October 2012, the University had 11,744 students, of whom:

    - 9,486 were first cycle Bachelor students
    - 2,123 were second cycle Master students
    - 153 were integrated study students
    - and 231 were doctoral candidates.

    In 2012
    - 2,434 students graduated obtaining a Bachelor degree
    - 872 graduated with a Master's degree
    - and 43 doctoral degrees were awarded.

    In total, more than 66,000 persons have graduated from the University since its establishment.

11. The University offers 47 Bachelor programmes, 53 Master programmes, and 2 integrated study programmes, of which the majority are in the fields of technological science (34 and 40 respectively). A number of programmes are also offered in Social Sciences (7+7); Art (1+1); Humanities (0+1) and Physical Sciences (5+5). The study of each of these programmes lead to awards at Level 6 of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (LQF) for Bachelor Programmes, Level 7 for Master Programmes and Level 8 for Doctoral programmes. The Lithuanian Framework was referenced in 2012 to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) and also to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Bologna Framework, during the same process.

12. In 2012 (as of 31 December 2012), 1,030 teachers, including 659 teachers with a doctoral degree, worked in the University. The University differentiates between two different types of doctoral degree, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and the Doctor Habilitus (*Habil. dr*).

13. The period reviewed in the self-evaluation covered 2007 to 2012.

14. VGTU's vision as stated in the Development Plan 2007-2013 is to *Be an attractive technical University for the researchers and students from Lithuania and abroad. Be significant in scientific*

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[1] Faculty of Environmental Engineering; Faculty of Architecture; Faculty of Electronics; Faculty of Fundamental Sciences; Faculty of Creative Industries; Faculty of Mechanics; Faculty of Civil Engineering; Faculty of Transport Engineering; Faculty of Business Management; and A. Gustaitis' Aviation Institute.

achievements and high-level education and research in the country and worldwide. Have major social importance for the country and be able to meet new challenges.

15. The stated mission is *to create, accumulate and disseminate scientific knowledge and cultural values, prepare specialists of highest competence and educate members of the society, cherish democracy and promote the economic growth of the country, competitive spirit in the economy, social welfare and peace as well as high quality of life.*[2]

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[2] The review panel notes that this mission, referred to in the SER differs from the mission stated in June 2012 *The Amendment to Annex 1 to the Resolution of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania "on the approval of the Statute of Vilnius Gediminas Technical University"* No. XI-2150, which also differs from the mission stated in the 2014-2020 Development Strategy of Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. The review team notes that this may, or may not be, a matter of translation, but as a reference point for this Report, the version of the mission in the 2007-2013 Development Plan is intended where there are references to the mission.

III. STRATEGIC PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

Strengths

1. There is preparedness for strategic thinking and the University has associated planning processes
2. There is ongoing and periodic monitoring of the plans
3. The Quality Management Office and team of staff are making good progress in their work and demonstrate good potential for assisting the University in meeting challenges in the area of academic quality as well as organisational and administrative quality
4. There is evidence of very active and engaged development work, over time, in the area of quality management systems and quality assurance processes; these systems take account of the wider European dimension of higher education
5. A code of ethics is in place and is implemented

Areas for development, it is recommended that:

a) the Rectorate should become more proactive in leading and directing change and in managing the directions in which Faculties develop
b) the University should establish a more formal approach to staff development which would include an alignment to the needs of the University strategy
c) the University make clear its proposed actions to address the problem of falling student numbers (due to the demographic changes, and other challenges such as stronger competition and lack of attractiveness of certain study programmes) and to take steps to communicate these plans and intended actions across the University
d) VGTU become more agile in its organizational arrangements, and planning and decision-making by reflecting on the size, composition (including gender balance) and functioning of its governance bodies seeking opportunities for the simplification and streamlining of its organisational structures and decision-making bodies, including the Rectorate and Senate
e) a system of costing and budget allocation is established which is as transparent as the current model, but is significantly simpler
f) all of the elements of the University's approach to quality need to be drawn together into a coherent strategy, which is then effectively communicated and implemented using appropriate measures
g) a programme of training be provided for all staff on the quality assurance model to aid its comprehension and implementation
h) consideration should be given to the establishment of a Quality Commission of Senate
i) steps should be taken establish a formal mechanism to 'close the feedback loop' in respect of student feedback

Strategy

16. VGTU has a committed senior management team with preparedness for strategic thinking. As required by legislation VGTU's three year strategic plans are revised annually, and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science, serving as the basis for the allocation of an annual budget.
17. The University takes seriously its obligation to address statutory planning and reporting requirements. The review team noted the various types of plans and their time spans, of 10 years, 7 years, 3 years and 1 year. The model of planning imposed challenges institutions' ability to implement and take effective actions. Whilst in VGTU there is preparedness for strategic thinking and the model may be valid and fit for purpose for the present context, improvement is required. The strong collegial environment has led to a vigorous development of plans and strategies at Department and Faculty level and the review team noted a degree of dependency on these

documents. A modern university needs to complement this strength with the articulation of direction at a high level, drawing together academic and support units into a coherent focussed mission. The review team *recommends* that the Rectorate becomes more proactive with respect to the strategic development of VGTU and in leading and directing change, and in managing the directions in which Faculties develop.

18. During the site visit, the review panel considered the newly devised 2014-2020 *Development Strategy of VGTU*. This document which takes account of national policy, the needs of the country and the wider European policy dimensions may be a useful tool to improve strategic planning. The document links to the University vision and mission and there are 49 indicators in the new plan which will assist in focussing, monitoring and reviewing implementation. The review team advises that effective use be made of the newly established indicators which are reasonable and comprehensive and will assist in the implementation of the strategic plan.

19. With regard to the current suite of strategic planning documents and development tools it is clear that a system of approval and monitoring of progress is in place. Plans are submitted to Council annually for approval and Senate considers updates on activities. Annual Plans are linked to budgets, and plans are considered by the Finance Committee before they go to Council. There is ongoing and periodic monitoring of the plans through the Internal Audit Division, whose work is aided by the collection of data and its storage in the information system. Data is utilised in the preparation of the annual report which also reflects on the implementation of institutional goals. Specifically with regard to academic study programmes, plans are proposed at Programme Committee level and, following consideration and approval, make their way to Department, to Faculty, to University Study Committee, to the Rectorate, finally to Senate and on to Council, being clarified and approved en route. It is noted that no annual reports on programmes are provided to Faculty or Senate: this is an action which the University may wish to consider, particularly in light of its framing of its academic quality assurance around the *ESG*, as is discussed in paragraphs 35-45 below.

20. It is clear that the strong collegial environment, referred to in paragraph 17, has ensured the sharing of information between the various committees and levels of the University. There was good knowledge of the self-evaluation process, as well as the processes of strategic planning and the University's implementation models. This was also reflected in conversations with external members of Council as well as with students.

21. The review team considered the model of staff appraisal in place in the University. The 2007-2013 Development Plan has as one of its goals the improvement of all staff, i.e. their professional development. Currently all staff participate in diverse annual review processes, but the panel suggests that University may benefit from a more formal approach, and *recommends* that a model be established which would include an alignment of staff development needs to the University strategy. A focus on the strategy during appraisal may enable the University and the Human Resources Department to address any skill or competency gap and provide appropriate supports to staff, thus enabling the achievement of the established strategic goals.

22. Having considered arrangements for staff training and development, the review team encourages the University to put in place an annual process of staff appraisal interviews for all staff (not only new or younger faculty); this should focus both on performance and also on individual development and training needs and can be used to provide input into overall University-level staff development and training-needs plan, to stimulate improvement in matters such as pedagogic innovation, and quality assurance.

23. The University's Senior Management advised the review team of the plan to restructure the physical environment reducing the number of sites of provision from seven to three campuses. The proposals seem to be well accepted by staff and students. The panel encourages VGTU to make swift progress with this and to use the opportunities it affords for greater organisational efficiency and effectiveness, including in the use of resources.

24. The current challenges presented by the national demographic changes and other circumstances causing a decline in student numbers are understood by all, but it is ***recommended*** that the University make clear its proposed actions to address this problem and to take steps to communicate these plans and intended actions across the University. This area was inadequately addressed in the SER.

25. A code of ethics is in place and is implemented. See paragraph 48.

Governance

26. The governance model of the University is established in Statute, the law having been amended most recently in 2012. It is understood that changes to the roles of Council and Senate around financial responsibilities may require study to ensure there is no duplication in the actions of the two bodies.

27. The key governance bodies specified in the legislation and the University's Organisational Chart are the Council, the Senate, the Rector who is supported by a collegial advisory body known as the Rectorate. Whilst certain elements of formation and operation are prescribed, there remains capacity for institutional discretion and choice around its management model.

28. The review team wishes to draw the University's attention to the requirements of a modern university in terms of effective and responsive organizational arrangements, and planning and decision-making processes. This was referred to in paragraph 17. The team believes that VGTU needs to become more agile in these matters and ***recommends*** that the University reflects on the size, composition and functioning of its governance bodies and also considers their gender balance. The Senate and Rectorate appear particularly large.

29. Consideration should be made as to whether the structures and processes at the top of the organisation are sufficiently effective and responsive. The review team ***recommends*** that the University seeks opportunities for the simplification and streamlining of its organisational structures and decision-making bodies, including the Rectorate and Senate. Possibilities for the speeding up of decision-making processes should be examined and the opportunity should also be taken to review the optimal number of Faculties, Departments, and cost centres (currently 10, 50 and 130 respectively).

Financial Management & Resources

30. The review panel met with representatives from all the different bodies of the University to learn about the budgeting and resource allocation processes. As mentioned above in paragraph 19 annual plans are developed with budgets which are approved by the University Finance Committee, before their consideration by Council.

31. The responsibilities of both the designated parties, such as the Rector and the Finance Director as well as the Faculties, Senate and Council were clear in these processes. Changes in responsibilities of Senate and Council around financial matters were understood.

32. Across a range of meetings with different constituencies a complex model of both costing work and allocating funds across the University was described. It was stated that whilst complex, with different criteria for allocating money depending on its source (government or self-generated), and different criteria for costing different types of projects, e.g. the University overhead is 10% in some instances and 15% in others, the model is comprehensive and allows for consistency.

33. Seemingly a legacy from various previous external requirements, the review panel considered the matrices being employed for different projects and diverse University contexts and acknowledges the transparency of the model. Nevertheless, it is ***recommended*** that a system with equal transparency, but which is significantly simpler be considered and adopted. This should assist financial planning; both at project and University level and also be less time-consuming in the process of various calculations.

34.   The review panel noted the University's desire to continue recent practice to seek as much funding as possible outside of the State allocated budget. This allows VGTU greater flexibility in how it manages and allocates its resources and the review panel supports this approach provided it is aligned to the strategy and engaged upon with prudence.

Quality Assurance

35.   The review panel paid very close attention to quality assurance and quality management matters in its evaluation of VGTU. The University provided a clear narrative regarding its approach to and its development of an understanding of quality assurance matters in higher education, which commenced broadly in 2004. It is understood that the University has now defined its approach, and is rolling out a range of tools to support the model being adopted. The approach is a comprehensive one which will integrate a number of quality systems according to focus area. It will use the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, 3ʳᵈ edition (2009) (*ESG*) to guide academic quality assurance, *Total Quality Management* (*TQM*) principles regarding processes, and also *International Organization for Standardization* (*ISO*) 9000 standards in areas where accreditation and certification are required, together with arrangements to meet the requirements of professional bodies.

36.   In considering this decision of the University, the review panel saw evidence of very active and engaged development work, over time, in the area of quality management systems and quality assurance processes. The approach being adopted is conceptually well-integrated and takes account of the wider European dimension of higher education.

37.   This conceptual development has been well supported by the Quality Management Office. The team of staff are making good progress in their work and demonstrate good potential for assisting the University in meeting challenges in the area of academic quality as well as organisational and administrative quality.

38.   The recent development of a computer programme/application, which maps all processes, plans and monitoring points for all University activities and which will be available to all University staff and students via the intranet, may be a useful tool to support and guide staff and students through various processes and communication chains.

39.   It is clear to the review panel that these very significant milestones of the University's quality journey challenge and prompt cultural and organisation change. Notwithstanding the excellent work completed to date, there remains a lack of ownership of quality throughout the organisation which will be essential to redress in order to harness energies for positive change. This is important for the University's risk management strategy, as the dangers of a poorly understood or poorly implemented quality system are significant for the University's students, graduates and reputation in general. If ownership of quality assurance, with its consequent institutional benefits, is to be achieved by all members of the organisation, the review panel ***recommends*** that all of the elements of the University's approach to quality need to be drawn together into a coherent strategy. This should then be effectively communicated and implemented using appropriate measures. This should be an important priority for the University. Supportive instruments should be strengthened and benefits of quality assurance processes made more visible. It is suggested that the seven elements of internal quality assurance described in the *ESG* may be useful ways to frame the University's conceptual model for academic quality assurance (and also enhance student-centred learning, as will be discussed in the next section).

40.   A further ***recommendation*** is that a programme of training be provided for all staff on the quality assurance model to aid its comprehension and implementation. This intervention may also be complemented by the identification of a quality coordinator in each Department who would support implementation of the quality assurance system and promote its organisational ownership.

41. Cultural change of this nature requires clear support and leadership from the top of the organisation and the review panel also *recommends* that consideration should be given to the establishment of a Quality Commission of Senate.

Student Involvement

42. The review team also considered arrangements for student involvement and representation in organisational processes and decision-making. Students are members of all committees at all levels of the organisation. Representatives of students whether from study programmes, committees or the student representative council were articulate and effective in their communications. Involvement in committees and governance bodies of the University seems to work well, though there was evidence that there is some variation between Faculties and Departments from the point of view of effectiveness.

43. Students are surveyed twice a year and asked to provide feedback on both teachers and on programmes. Students advised they were aware of the surveys and participated in them. However there did not appear to be a systematic analysis of the percentage of respondents by the University or a consideration of other ways of collecting feedback, though it was indicated that student membership of recently established programme committees also provided a forum for student feedback.

44. From discussions with students it is clear that arrangements for student feedback are in place, but the review panel *recommends* that steps be taken to establish a formal mechanism to 'close the feedback loop'. There does not appear to be an effective formal mechanism for informing students of actions being taken on the issues they raise when providing feedback.

45. In the context of the implementation of the adopted quality assurance model, it appears to the review team that there is a good level of commitment amongst members of the self-evaluation group and that there may be a benefit to the organisation if the self-evaluation process continues with the retention of the core SER working group, with membership to include those persons with whom the review panel met during their meeting to discuss self-evaluation matters. This forum could be used for considering the Institutional Review Report and Recommendations and for advising senior management on future actions.

Learning Resources

46. The review panel discussed the report of the Research and Studies Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) June 2013, *Findings Regarding the Compliance of VGTU Learning Resources with the Minimum Quality Requirements for the Infrastructure and Organisation of Higher Education Studies*. VGTU was given a positive evaluation, though one area required investigation, point 4: "the ratio of science (art) doctors with state-funded tuition to third degree entrants with state-funded tuition" did not meet the MOSTA requirement. In the dialogue with the University the MOSTA model for the measurement of completion rates was considered. Given the demographic of the doctoral student cohort, and also the publishing requirement of the University in respect of doctoral theses, it is evident that a reasonable study and support model is in place. The review panel noted the University's intention to advise MOSTA of its view that the metrics around PhD completion rates require amendment in light of particular factors influencing student completion. It was also noted that the University is very committed to extending supports to students to enable to successfully finish their studies in the requisite time. The narrative provided by VGTU was rational and clear and the review the panel is happy to agree with MOSTA "that resources were appropriate and adequate for the activities being conducted".

Risk Analysis

47. With regard to risk analysis, the SWOT exercise conducted by the University offered some opportunity to identify risks, and implement strategies to address them. Whilst all the respective

groups met by the review team affirmed the usefulness of the SWOT conducted, a more developed understanding of the concept of risk would benefit the University. As indicated in the Introduction, paragraph 5, there is scope to strengthen the capability for self-critical analysis, for clearly projecting the achievements and strengths of VGTU, and also, **all** of the challenges and issues facing the University. The findings of a SWOT should be systematically and periodically reviewed by the various organs of governance, according to their respective roles and authority. This should assist VGTU leaderships in implementing its vision.

Code of Ethics

48.   As indicated above, the review panel *confirmed* that a Code of Ethics is in place. There are two documents, one for staff and one for students, both of which are on the University website. The review panel supports the University's plan to produce a single document, which was identified in the SER as a priority. The Law and Ethics Commission of the Senate, as described during the meeting with the Senate representatives, takes a lead in this area, and the Human Resources Department also has a role in respect of staff. Courses are provided on ethical publishing by the library. However the discussions held with the various constituencies led the panel to strongly support the integration of the code into a single text, which sets standards and refers to specific procedures which can be invoked where standards are breached.

Judgement on the area: Strategic Planning and Management is given a positive evaluation.

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Strengths

1. The University has put in place an on-going process for the modernisation of academic programmes, taking account of external (national and European) frameworks
2. VGTU has an attractive range of relevant vocational and professionally-orientated programmes which are valued by external stakeholders and by graduates and students themselves
3. Students are aware of staff research and have opportunities to be involved; the research informs teaching and learning, though this varies between Departments and Faculties
4. Work is being done in developing a monitoring and follow-up system for considering the careers and pathways of graduates
5. There is external engagement with partners (cooperation and involvement) for the development and review of the curriculum and of academic programmes
6. Opportunities for mobility (staff and students) are well publicised and well understood, and the take-up is good; the Erasmus Support Network is active and is valued by students

Areas for Development, it is recommended that:

a) VGTU considers how all students across all Departments and Faculties can be made aware of staff research and of opportunities to be involved, thus ensuring greater consistency in student experience
b) the University's Rectorate and Senate should, as a matter of priority, review the opportunities for redressing unnecessary fragmentation, overlap and duplication in the study programme portfolio, and ensure relevance and attractiveness of programmes
c) VGTU review its practices around language provision and seeks ways to increase both the number of languages available and also the amount of tuition available for students on the courses taught currently
d) the University moves quickly towards the next phase of developing a learning outcomes approach by focussing on improvement and enhancement in teaching and learning
e) a central plan for the enhancement of learning and teaching should be developed, with Departments being made accountable to the Vice Rector for Studies
f) the University reflects on good practices and established guidelines around collaborative provision and implement any improvements required
g) the University's approach to Lifelong Learning should be more directly informed by a formal and systematic analysis of market needs and by market research
h) the University adopt of the model, commonly used elsewhere in Europe, of locating overall leadership and coordination of Lifelong Learning in a central department
i) the methodology for evaluating and tracking first employment destinations of graduates should be revised and actions should be taken to improve the response rate
j) the University reviews the arrangements for student services and considers ways to provide a more student-centred, user-friendly, and easier to access service located in one central department that covers all personal, welfare, financial support and guidance needs of students

Programmes, Institutional Strategy and the National Environment

49.   VGTU has an attractive range of relevant vocational and professionally-orientated programmes which are valued by external stakeholders and by graduates and students themselves. In various meetings students and graduates alike were positive about the offering and drew the panel's attention to some of the unique programmes available at the University, and not provided elsewhere.

50.   With a mission to provide technical higher education, VGTU is proud of its remit and tradition, and is committed to addressing national and regional needs, aligning its programmes to matters of national strategy. The review panel noted that the University is conscious of a need for graduates in the science and technology fields, and is working through its Centres and Institutes to focus on particular needs, e.g. environmental studies, energy engineering, transport engineering. The panel also noted that some students' projects take a focus on an issue or problem of particular national significance, e.g., energy savings for buildings.

51.   There was evidence that students are aware of staff research and have opportunities to be involved; this research informs teaching and learning. However the review team noted that this varies between Departments and Faculties, and *recommends* that VGTU consider how greater consistency in this can be achieved.

52.   During the review, the portfolio of programmes provided by the University was a particular focus of the review team. The team paid close attention to the nature and range of the University's current suite of study programmes. Whilst national classification requirements are noted, and also the range of specialities available, nevertheless the review panel firmly believes that there is unnecessary fragmentation, overlap and duplication in the portfolio. It is *recommended* that the University's Rectorate and Senate should, as a matter of priority, review the opportunities for redressing these issues through a review of study programmes being offered. Inefficiencies should be eliminated and the possible narrowing of graduate career options, through unnecessary programme specialisation should be addressed. In the view of the panel, a review of the programme portfolio (particularly at Bachelor level) has the potential for achieving resource efficiencies for the University, and the introduction of additional electives and options for students. It is noted that such steps would have the support of social partners and graduates of the University. VGTU may find it useful to conduct such a review in the context of the exercise on streamlining the organisational structure recommended in paragraph 29, under Strategic Planning and Management.

53.   As suggested above, there is a lack of elective choices available for students on some programmes. Were programmes to be combined, and parallel modules on diverse programmes removed, it would enable the provision of greater choice for students.

54.   An area in which students and graduates would welcome greater choice is in the provision of language classes. Currently there is insufficient provision within the University for students to gain expertise in a range of foreign languages. The review panel *recommends* that VGTU reviews its practices around language provision and seeks ways to increase both the number of languages available and also the amount of tuition available for students on the courses taught currently.

Stakeholder Involvement: Cooperation with Academic, Social and Business Partners

55.   The University introduced a system of programme committees in early 2013. The model adopted includes stakeholder representation. As well as teaching staff there are student representatives and also representatives of industry on all committees. To date the model appears to operate well.

56.   There is significant engagement from the industrial and business world with the programme portfolio through the presence of part-time and guest lecturers, thus bringing workplace exposure into the classroom.

57.   Discussion on the balance between specialist and general qualifications identified that industry will often need to train graduates in the particular needs of an enterprise, and that this is to be

expected in the relationship between academic and business partners. Graduates may always lack very specific technical skills. The tension arising from this dynamic is recognised by social and business partners as positive leading to ongoing reflection on the nature of programmes and their efficacy. Stakeholders are happy that they have adequate ways to engage with and influence University programme direction.

58. The review panel also noted that many business and industry entities have cooperation agreements with the University, and also many businesses take students on internships during their study programmes. Cooperation agreements provide for students to take on real-life industry problems as projects on their programmes, in particular during the final year.

59. It was suggested by some partners that VGTU provides the strongest cohort of engineering graduates in the region and they should like to see an increase in both the number of jobs available, and the number of graduates in this field.

Qualifications Frameworks, Standards, Learning Outcomes

60. The University has put in place an on-going process for the modernisation of academic programmes, taking account of external (national and European) frameworks. The review panel notes that the Lithuania Qualifications Framework (LQF), established in 2010, has been referenced to both the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and to the Framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Bologna Framework) in 2012. It may be useful if in the comprehensive study programme catalogue on the VGTU website, reference is made to the LQF Level of the respective programmes.

61. In the context of the development of qualifications' frameworks, the review panel noted that the establishment of study programmes along a model of learning outcomes has been adopted by the University and that it is a core element of the evolving process of modernisation. There has been some progress in matters such as curriculum design and development. However there is a need to deepen in this understanding and go beyond the mechanics of a learning outcomes model, particularly in respect of innovative teaching, learning and assessment practices. The review panel *recommends* that the University moves quickly towards the next phase of developing a learning outcomes approach by focussing on improvement and enhancement in teaching and learning. This requires that top-level leadership is provided to stimulate innovative pedagogy and also the identification and dissemination of good practice.

Enhancing Teaching and Learning

62. As indicated above the process of modernising the curriculum has led to innovations in teaching and learning of a limited nature. If teaching quality is to be improved, it is not sufficient to depend only on the preferences and initiatives of individual Departments. To achieve institutional change in this area it is *recommended* that a central plan for the enhancement of learning and teaching should be developed, with Departments being made accountable to the Vice Rector for Studies. This plan should dovetail with the staff appraisal model referred to in paragraph 21, and the institutional strategy. In this way a coherent training and staff development programme can be created to address the need to enhance teaching and learning.

63. The review panel suggests that the development of student-centred learning should be a particular priority for the University. Areas for development may include a better understanding of active pedagogy; a greater use of technological teaching and assessment tools; greater application of problem-based learning; the introduction of alternative assessment models such as observation, interviews, performance tasks, exhibitions, demonstrations, portfolios, journals, self-evaluation and peer-evaluation; etc. The University may also wish to consider the inclusion of questions around innovative pedagogy on its student surveys.

Joint Programmes

64. The University has a good selection of joint programmes at Bachelor and Master levels and is to be commended for the development of these initiatives. The joint programmes align well with the Lithuania Ministry of Education and Science *Action Plan 2013-16* and European priorities, e.g. those of the European Research Area (ERA) and matters identified in the EHEA Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) Work Plan 2012-2015. The joint programmes also provide opportunities for building on VGTU's strengths in work with partner higher education institutions.

65. However, some of the processes around due diligence, alignment with strategic priorities, and the legal infrastructure of agreements may need strengthening. Currently VGTU has no strategic plan for the development of higher education partnerships; there are no criteria to guide the University in choosing which university, in which location, in which discipline partnerships should be established and for what purpose(s).

66. The review panel also notes that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is not a sufficiently strong instrument to underpin a joint degree – a legal agreement must be in place. Matters relating to the recognition of qualifications and the issuing of diplomas need to be agreed and stipulated. There are also established models for a European Diploma Supplement (EDS) for a jointly awarded degree that VGTU may wish to adopt. It is *recommended* that the University reflects on good practices and established guidelines around collaborative provision and implements any improvements required.[3]

Lifelong Learning (LLL)

67. The European Union (EU) and countries of the EHEA involved in the Bologna process have a commitment to the promotion and development of LLL. The *Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)*[4] takes LLL (and mobility) as its first objective. Member states reflect this commitment in different ways, but it is a shared objective of education systems.

68. In view of demographic changes the area of LLL is increasingly important to VGTU. The review panel has noted that there are a number of current or planned initiatives, activities and programmes (such as training and retraining, continual professional development programmes and professional up-dating, and short courses for all age groups). It is *recommended* that this activity should be more directly informed by a formal and systematic analysis of market needs and by market research.

69. The panel also *recommends* the adoption of the model commonly used elsewhere in Europe, of locating overall leadership and coordination of LLL in a central department. This would bring benefits to the University and would draw together the important contributions of the Careers Office, the Academic Affairs Office, and the Faculties to the provision and development of lifelong learning.

70. The establishment of a dedicated centre would also facilitate a broadening and deepening of understanding of lifelong learning. The University may benefit from identifying new potential beneficiaries of LLL programmes to the adoption of changing technologies which may enable VGTU to reach more students.

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[3] *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher education in the European region*, Lisbon (1997); the Committee of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, *Recommendation the Recognition of Joint Degrees*, Strasbourg (2004); the OECD/UNESCO *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education* (2005); and the UNESCO/COUNCIL OF EUROPE *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education* (2007); *Joint degrees: legal framework in Member States*, EACEA (2013) http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/beneficiaries/documents/action1/jointdegreeprogrammes_may2013.pdf; *Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees*, European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (2012); *Bridge Handbook: Joint Programmes and Recognition of Joint Degrees, Bridge Project* (2012).
[4] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/policy-framework_en.htm

International Mobility

71. As indicated above the *ET 2020* takes 'making lifelong learning and mobility a reality' as its first objective. VGTU demonstrated a commitment to international mobility and compares favourably with other Lithuanian institutions in respect of numbers of students and staff participating in mobility programmes.

72. The Erasmus exchange programme has been in place at VGTU since 1999. VGTU commenced Erasmus Internships in 2008 and with Study Placements in 2010. The numbers participating on internships have grown from 49 in 2008 to 127 in 2012; and on study placements from 48 in 2010 to 72 in 2012. This is good growth from a zero-based start, and the review panel would encourage the University to continue in this work. With regard to staff (teaching and support staff), VGTU has the highest number of outgoing staff across Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This is a strength for the University, and should enhance the learning environment through the application of lessons learnt abroad, and through reflection on what VGTU can contribute to the HEIs it partners with.

73. The University also has a strong programme in place to bring visiting lecturers to VGTU. In 2012 approximately 120 lecturers visited the University from abroad 70-80 of whom came under the Erasmus programme. They visited under government programmes as well as through local initiatives. The University is demonstrating a clear commitment to internationalisation and to integrating guest lecturers into the core curriculum.

74. The review panel found that students and staff were well-informed about mobility and exchange opportunities and students indicated that they received excellent support from the International Office in making arrangements and learning of opportunities. There is an Erasmus Support Network (ESN) which is active and is valued by students also.

75. As indicated in paragraph 54 the University should increase the number of languages available for study. This will enhance opportunities for mobility.

76. In discussions on potential new partnerships academic staff indicated that a challenge in establishing exchanges arises from the difficulty in finding exactly matching subjects and ensuring comparability of learning outcomes. The review panel suggests that a more open approach be adopted with regard to mobility, and that the University reflect on the spirit behind Erasmus exchanges, whereby a broad set of learning outcomes can be achieved in many settings. This reflection may be aligned to the review of programmes recommended in paragraph 52 and may lead to revision of intended learning outcomes to facility mobility.

Employability

77. The review panel noted the work that is being done in developing a monitoring and follow-up system for graduates. The introduction of a database through an EU funded project is a good step. The review panel would support the findings of the SER that this work needs to be developed and more fully embedded into University practices.

78. The intranet being developed for employers and students is another good project, but equally the review panel encourages the University to make progress on this, and incorporate graduates.

79. In developing these projects and considering career and employment opportunities, the work of the Careers Service is recognised. The introduction of graduate surveys is important. The panel also noted the reference made to a student employability rate of 90%, but the rate was based on a low response. It is *recommended* that the methodology for evaluating and tracking first employment destinations of graduates should be revised and actions should be taken to improve the response rate.

Student Support and Guidance

80. The University has a range of offices and departments which provide services to the student body. The Student Representative body is funded and supported with offices and other administrative facilities and funding is also provided to clubs and societies, although there appears to be a lack of space provided for social and self-directed learning activities within the University.

81. Student supports are distributed across Faculties in different ways, and students attend different offices for different services, e.g. the International Office regarding mobility options; and the Careers Office on employment options; whilst each Faculty also has an office that looks after placement/internships and also provides information on exchanges. There is no overarching student affairs office. Students with issues pertaining to accommodation, finance, or scholarships in some instances go to a Faculty office, and in other instances to a central office. Faculties may also respond to queries in different ways. This dispersed model of service provision does not appear to be either student-friendly or efficient.

The review panel *recommends* that the University should review these arrangements and consider ways to provide a more student-centred, user-friendly, and easier to access service located in one central department that covers all personal, welfare, financial support and guidance needs of students. A consideration of the current European trend, of establishing a 'one stop shop' for student services, may be beneficial during this review.

Judgement on the area: Academic Studies and Lifelong Learning is given positive evaluation.

V. RESEARCH AND/OR ART ACTIVITIES

Strengths

1. The University has identified a clear set of priorities for future research, and these are known and understood by the academic community
2. There is evidence of positive and constructive strategic thinking and internal debate regarding future organisational structures and arrangements for the sustainability of research activity, including interdisciplinary work, and the need for rationalisation
3. There is a positive approach to the development of a culture of publications in peer-reviewed journals

Areas for Development, it is recommended that:

a) early progress should be made in the exercise of rationalizing the current configuration of research units and in growing more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research by working across Faculty and research unit boundaries
b) staff broaden their approach to deepening knowledge transfer activities by seeking and developing applied research and knowledge transfer opportunities with employers and other business partners to a greater extent
c) the Centre for Entrepreneurship should not be located in the Faculty of Business Management, but should be located centrally, becoming a focal point for the interface between the University and its environment, providing a service to and involving representatives from all Faculties and research units
d) in the light of the ERA objectives, the University should reflect on the objective of gender equality, which poses particular challenges in the technological fields, and considers measures it may take to address inequalities
e) there should be a continued and greater focus by staff on publication in international journals to strengthen the research profile of the University
f) the University adopts a wider perspective by benchmarking against European HEIs rather than local institutions

Mission-Appropriate Research

82. The University Development Plan 2007-2013 sets out the vision and mission of VGTU and establishes strategic goals, identifying high-level research and applied research as key priorities. It firmly articulates its nature as a 'technical' university, and that it is committed, practice-based, technical research which addresses national issues, as well as integrating into broader European research concerns. It offers doctoral studies in 14 fields, or sub-fields which clearly reflect the University's history as a Civil Engineering Institute and are in keeping with the stated mission: Civil Engineering, Environment Engineering and Landscape Management, Economics, Transport Engineering, Management and Administration, Electronics and Electronic Engineering, Energetics and Thermal engineering, Materials Engineering, Mechanics Engineering, Measurement Engineering, Computer Engineering, Mathematics, Physics and Art Critics.

83. The University recognises a key challenge is reducing student numbers, and during meetings stated that this has prompted a focus on lifelong learning and also on research, specifically proposing the development of high quality research and an increase in postgraduate students. In

this context the University has sought to revise its research strategy, recognising that there are too many fragmented projects of low value.

84. This has led to considerable internal debate resulting in the reconfiguring of research units, focussing on interdisciplinary fields and also on the development of virtual centres across Faculties. These research centres do not have their own dedicated staff, but staff are drawn from across a variety of Departments. The reconfiguration exercise, which was conducted in conjunction with external stakeholders and which referenced national and European policy documents, led to seven research areas being distilled and approved by Council. The areas are intended to assist in the goal of increasing the competitiveness of Lithuania and are viewed as sitting between fundamental research and applied research. The review team *recommends* that early progress be made in the exercise of rationalizing the current configuration of research units and in growing more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research by working across Faculty and research unit boundaries; the strategic thinking in this area is good, but action is now needed.

85. The review panel noted that VGTU has some very strong niche areas of research such as the roads engineering and railway engineering, as well as other dimensions of transport engineering.

86. During discussions with the various members of the University community, the strong relationships with various stakeholders in business and industry were evident. The challenges relating to deepening knowledge transfer activities was acknowledged. The work with science and technology parks is noted, as is the work of students conducting practical projects for companies as part of their programmes of study, many of which are aligned to local, regional and national policy priorities. The review team *recommends* that staff broaden their approach to this by seeking and developing applied research and knowledge transfer opportunities with employers and other business partners to a greater extent.

87. One particular project that the University presented was a Centre of Entrepreneurship which is located in the Faculty of Business Management. The review panel recognises that there is no strong tradition in this area, but that a Centre for Entrepreneurship provides an opportunity to support applied research, networking, the establishment of consultancy and various projects, etc. It is *recommended* that this be a central function, i.e. that the Centre is not located in a Faculty, but should be a focal point for the interface between the University and its environment, providing a service to and involving representatives from all Faculties and research units.

88. The University referenced the European Research Area (ERA) in the creation of its Development Plan. The review panel notes the objectives of the ERA under Europe 2020 as the following:
   - increased effectiveness of national research systems
   - optimal levels of transnational co-operation and competition
   - an open labour market for researchers by improving researcher mobility, training and careers as well as an open and merit-based recruitment
   - gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research
   - optimal circulation and transfer of scientific knowledge (EU, 2012)[5]

   The panel also notes the activities of VGTU which address some of these objectives, such as investment in research; strengthening cross-border links and joint programmes. It is *recommended* that the University reflect on the objective of gender equality, which poses particular challenges in the technological fields, and considers measures it may take to address inequalities. One mechanism that may be useful in this exercise would be to commence the monitoring of gender and participation in various activities, programmes, bodies, etc. (This is also of relevance in the context of paragraph 28 under governance in section III).

89. The review panel noted that VGTU registers between 5-10 new patents a year and that the University has developed a new strategy to help researchers in the patenting process. The

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[5] http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era-communication/joint-statement-17072012_en.pdf

University also has a patent attorney/consultant available to its researchers. The review panel encourages VGTU in this work and suggests that a fully developed intellectual property framework should underpin this activity.

International Links and Mobility

90. The most recent statistics indicate that in 2012, VGTU participated in 31 international research projects. A number of the projects around transport and energy reflect areas of high activity and focus within VGTU. Over half the international research projects are funded through the EU Commission, the others from other international funders. The review panel noted that due to the external funding *some* labs and facilities are equipped to a very high standard. This is a significant advantage for these disciplines and may offer a way of attracting research students from abroad: it is noted that some exchange students come to VGTU to avail themselves of access to specific laboratories.

91. As indicated above, doctoral programmes are available in 14 disciplines. A further 53 Masters programmes are offered. All students have the opportunity to spend time abroad during their postgraduate studies, and students who had participated in exchange programmes were very positive about their experiences. Since 2011, it is compulsory for PhD students to spend a period of study abroad. The professional support provided by the International Office was also evidenced. Funding is provided to some students to study abroad and students are encouraged to engage in mobility programmes.

Publications

92. The general University practice of encouraging staff and students to publish their work is noted, in particular the good practice of encouraging young researchers in this. The review panel also noted that the encouragement of staff to place research publications in international peer-reviewed journals has been emphasized in the strategic plan and that this has led to an increase in the number of articles published in such journals (SER, p.50). The review panel *recommends* a continued and greater focus by staff on publication in international journals to strengthen the research profile of the University.

93. The review panel acknowledged the positive work of the VGTU Library and Press in the active work around publications. The annual publication of 19 journals; 100 textbooks and study guides; and 50 PhD theses (registered with ISBN numbers) reflects well on VGTU. It demonstrates a commitment to the dissemination of learning. The University monitors the impact of the publications: 8 of the 19 journals are indexed by Web of Science.

94. The promotion of an open access model to staff and student research is also noted by the panel, and the online record of all staff publications is a useful tool.

95. In considering its research profile and practices, VGTU may benefit more by looking at European technical universities, rather than benchmarking with national institutions. The review panel *recommends* adopting a wider perspective and benchmarking against European HEIs.

Teaching and other Support for Research Students

96. As indicated above, Master students as well as PhD students are encouraged in publishing their research. Significant supports are provided to students in this. There is a dedicated office to support PhD students.

97. On the Masters programmes a half-year mandatory course is provided on approaches to research addressing issues such as, how to design a research question; how to prepare experiments; and which journal to choose. Courses are provided on, how to prepare and present a seminar paper; on working as a teacher or demonstrator; and on writing scientific papers. Additional courses on these topics are provided at PhD level. A four-year plan indicating the approach to be adopted when undertaking a PhD is also required. It is noted that research students are required to teach 60 hours

a semester for each of the four years of the PhD programme. Some Faculties have fortnightly sessions where students present papers in preparation for the defence of a thesis at a viva voce examination.

98. The review panel noted the effective supervision arrangements in place for students. A range of practices complement each other, from formal meetings, twice a year, to potential daily engagement with a supervisor in respect of experiments to weekly Departmental meetings.

Judgement on the area: Research and/or Art Activities is given positive evaluation.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Strengths

1. From the evidence available, including external stakeholder feedback, it is apparent that the University is making a positive impact at regional level, reflecting well the technological profile of VGTU

2. There is a lot of activity, a good variety of industrial and societal partners, a wide range of formal agreements, and external involvement in university processes

3. There are good relations and exchange of information (including informal) between the University and its regional partners (and between partners themselves) on an on-going basis

4. It is apparent that the University's staff participate in and contribute in various ways to community and voluntary service activities

Areas for Development, it is recommended that:

a) the Partnerships Support Strategy should be broadened beyond business engagement to include all educational partnerships, and also the international dimension

b) full and effective use should be made of the indicators and measures set in the new Development Plan 2014-2020 *Plėtros strategijos Stebėsenos rodiklių sąrašas*, involving external partners and stakeholders in the process for monitoring progress

c) steps should be taken to create realizable outcomes for the recently re-formed Alumni Association for example, in areas such as income generation, internships, and profile raising

Mission & Strategic Plan – Engaging with the Community

99. From the evidence available, including external stakeholder feedback, it is apparent that the University is making a positive impact at regional level, reflecting well the technological profile of VGTU. There is a lot of activity and a good variety of industrial and societal partners, a wide range of formal agreements, and external involvement in university processes.

100. There are good relations and exchange of information (including informal) between the University and its regional partners (and between partners themselves) on an on-going basis.

101. A significant amount of VGTU's work with its social, business and industrial partners relates to applied research and collaborative projects of various kinds. The University distinguishes this form of research and industry engagement from more theoretical research, which has been addressed in section V.

102. As indicated in section V, the University is moving towards an interdisciplinary approach and this is in all areas of community and industry engagement. Small start-up companies draw together students, staff, business and industry personnel in shared areas of interest and expertise. A project with Birštonas Town Municipality which drew together a wide spectrum of the University community is a good example of an interdisciplinary approach to a local problem and an integrated problem-solving approach (SER, p.58). These projects and those referred to in paragraph 104 align well to local, regional and national development strategies, particularly addressing priorities around transport and logistics.

103. Stakeholders indicated a high regard for the University and an appreciation of the institution's expertise particularly in the areas of transport engineering and its specialisations. It is clear that the University has made and continues to make a significant contribution to Lithuanian society and its transport infrastructure.

104. Community partners also affirmed that the University is very open to new initiatives with industry. Examples given included research projects conducted by students on real industry problems, as

well as the openness of the University to having industry participate as guest lecturers on programmes.

105. The areas of activity of the University with its partners are aligned to and informed by Strategic Plan. Although the 2007-2013 mission does not make direct reference to the technical profile of the University, that resides in the vision, the activities do reflect the profile of a technical university. As noted in footnote 2, the language of the mission in a number of locations varies. It is *recommended* that there should be one version of the mission, including in English, and that it should be used to focus the activities of the institution.

Voluntary Work

106. It is apparent that the University's staff participate in and contribute in various ways to community and voluntary service activities. The review panel noted that in the period 2007–2012, the University participated in 42 projects dedicated to the understanding and promotion of cultural heritage at the local, national and international level. Some of the projects were focussed on strengthening the local communities and improving the social cohesion. Many of the projects were conducted on a low budget or were implemented on a completely voluntary basis. The work done with schools as noted in paragraphs 113 and 114 is of particular note.

107. At a more local level initiatives of the Erasmus Students Network (ESN) involve community ventures such as visiting children in hospital, and in kindergartens; conducting fund-raising for children's charities; collecting toys; etc. The ESN also takes part in national project on a clean environment.

Social Inclusion

108. The University is promoting access to its programmes for students with disabilities and provides basic information on its website for students seeking entry to its programmes. VGTU may wish to enhance the information provided for prospective students, and also consider the range of supports available, including for those students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc.

Partnership Support

109. The review panel notes that the Partnerships Support Strategy focuses primarily on links with social partners and the need to generate funding in that area. This is a useful task. However, the panel *recommends* that this Strategy should be broadened beyond business engagement to include all educational partnerships, and also the international dimension, setting criteria for the nature of engagements. Paragraphs 65 and 66 also refer in this context.

Impact Measures

110. Currently the University collects a range of data by which it can assess its impact on the region. They include metrics such as contracts received from business, public sector, industry; presence in the media; industry collaborative projects, etc.. It is not captured in a systematic manner, nor reported on in a consistent way. Information is distributed across various departments.

111. The new Development Plan 2014 – 2020 sets out a series of impact measures to assess its contribution regionally and nationally which were not available in the previous plan. The review panel regards this as a positive step and *recommends* the full and effective use of these indicators and measures, and the involvement of external partners and stakeholders in the process for monitoring progress (see *Plėtros strategijos Stebėsenos rodiklių sąrašas*, pp. 1-7).

Alumni Association

112. The review panel notes that the Alumni Association has recently been re-formed and it is *recommended* that steps should be taken to create realizable outcomes for the short term (for example, in areas such as income generation, internships, and profile raising).

Schools

113.   The relationship with high schools was also raised during the evaluation. Local schools indicated the importance of the relationship with VGTU for the school, and that they welcomed visits from lecturers and students. One of the local high schools expressed appreciation of support received in seminars in Chemistry, Maths, Physics, etc. The panel noted that the school also has meetings with Erasmus coordinators – to promote this for pupils who progress to University. Special courses are offered for teachers in Information Technology, Mathematics, Economics, etc. Other examples of engagement with schools include the development of a robotics school for children by the University and where the University invites pupils from high schools to the campus to attend seminars and workshops.

114.   The work of the Faculty of Environmental Engineering in maintaining a mobile laboratory which is taken to schools in small towns and villages which do not have the facilities for laboratory work associated with the sciences is an excellent initiative. It makes a significant contribution to those schools as well as being a valuable promotion of the University. It is understood that the number of technical science students is decreasing. Whilst also a national issue, the University's work with schools as identified here, is to be encouraged as a way to motivate more people to study technical disciplines.

Judgement on the area: Impact on Regional and National Development is given positive evaluation.

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of examples of good practice identified by the review panel have been highlighted in the Report. These include the following:

1. VGTU has an attractive range of relevant vocational and professionally-orientated programmes which are valued by external stakeholders and by graduates and students themselves

2. Students are aware of staff research and have opportunities to be involved; this research informs teaching and learning

3. Opportunities for mobility (staff and students) are well publicised and well understood, and the take-up is good. The Erasmus Support Network is active and is valued by students

4. There is evidence of positive and constructive strategic thinking and internal debate regarding future organisational structures and arrangements for the sustainability of research activity, including interdisciplinary work, and the need for rationalisation

5. There is a positive approach to the development of a culture of publications in peer-reviewed journals

6. From the evidence available, including external stakeholder feedback, it is apparent that the University is making a positive impact at regional level, reflecting well the technological profile of VGTU

The following is a summary of the review panel's recommendations:

1. Strategic Planning and Management
   It is recommended that:
a) the Rectorate should become more proactive in leading and directing change and in managing the directions in which Faculties develop
b) the University should establish a more formal approach to staff development which would include an alignment to the needs of the University strategy
c) the University make clear its proposed actions to address the problem of falling student numbers (due to the demographic changes, and other challenges such as stronger competition and lack of attractiveness of certain study programmes) and to take steps to communicate these plans and intended actions across the University
d) VGTU become more agile in its organizational arrangements, and planning and decision-making by reflecting on the size, composition (including gender balance) and functioning of its governance bodies seeking opportunities for the simplification and streamlining of its organisational structures and decision-making bodies, including the Rectorate and Senate
e) a system of costing and budget allocation is established which is as transparent as the current model, but is significantly simpler
f) all of the elements of the University's approach to quality need to be drawn together into a coherent strategy, which is then effectively communicated and implemented using appropriate measures
g) a programme of training be provided for all staff on the quality assurance model to aid its comprehension and implementation
h) consideration should be given to the establishment of a Quality Commission of Senate
i) steps should be taken establish a formal mechanism to 'close the feedback loop' in respect of student feedback

2. Academic Studies & Lifelong Learning
   It is recommended that:
a) VGTU considers how all students across all Departments and Faculties can be made aware of staff research and of opportunities to be involved, thus ensuring greater consistency in student experience

b) the University's Rectorate and Senate should, as a matter of priority, review the opportunities for redressing unnecessary fragmentation, overlap and duplication in the study programme portfolio, and ensure relevance and attractiveness of programmes

c) VGTU review its practices around language provision and seeks ways to increase both the number of languages available and also the amount of tuition available for students on the courses taught currently

d) the University moves quickly towards the next phase of developing a learning outcomes approach by focussing on improvement and enhancement in teaching and learning

e) a central plan for the enhancement of learning and teaching should be developed, with Departments being made accountable to the Vice Rector for Studies

f) the University reflects on good practices and established guidelines around collaborative provision and implement any improvements required

g) the University's approach to Lifelong Learning should be more directly informed by a formal and systematic analysis of market needs and by market research

h) the University adopt of the model, commonly used elsewhere in Europe, of locating overall leadership and coordination of Lifelong Learning in a central department

i) the methodology for evaluating and tracking first employment destinations of graduates should be revised and actions should be taken to improve the response rate

j) the University reviews the arrangements for student services and considers ways to provide a more student-centred, user-friendly, and easier to access service located in one central department that covers all personal, welfare, financial support and guidance needs of students

3. **Research and Art Activities**
   It is recommended that:

a) early progress should be made in the exercise of rationalizing the current configuration of research units and in growing more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research by working across Faculty and research unit boundaries

b) staff broaden their approach to deepening knowledge transfer activities by seeking and developing applied research and knowledge transfer opportunities with employers and other business partners to a greater extent

c) the Centre for Entrepreneurship should not be located in the Faculty of Business Management, but should be located centrally, becoming a focal point for the interface between the University and its environment, providing a service to and involving representatives from all Faculties and research units

d) in the light of the ERA objectives, the University should reflect on the objective of gender equality, which poses particular challenges in the technological fields, and considers measures it may take to address inequalities

e) there should be a continued and greater focus by staff on publication in international journals to strengthen the research profile of the University

f) the University adopts a wider perspective by benchmarking against European HEIs rather than local institutions

4. **Impact on Regional and National Development**
   It is recommended that:

a) the Partnerships Support Strategy should be broadened beyond business engagement to include all educational partnerships, and also the international dimension

b) full and effective use should be made of the indicators and measures set in the new Development Plan 2014-2020m. *Plėtros Strategijos Stebėsenos Rodiklių Sąrašas*, involving external partners and stakeholders in the process for monitoring progress

c) steps should be taken to create realizable outcomes for the recently re-formed Alumni Association for example, in areas such as income generation, internships, and profile raising

For consideration by the Ministry of Education and Science

The following are some observations that the review panel offers for consideration by the Ministry of Education and Science:

- In the judgement of the review team the frequent changes in the national higher education laws leads to a lack of continuity in the higher education sector. For university planning to become effective there is a need for a stable long-term higher education strategy and a more settled planning environment. The current arrangements lead to planning overload, as reflected in the requirement for a university to produce ten-year, seven-year, and three-year plans, together with annual activity plans. This regulatory planning context is inefficient and does not facilitate effective and meaningful planning arrangements.
- The ministry should take further steps to support universities to motivate more people to study technical disciplines
- Consideration should be given to establishing a national programme of centres of excellence for research

VIII. JUDGEMENT

Vilnius Gediminas Technical University is given **a positive evaluation**.

Grupės vadovas:
Team leader: Professor Jethro Newton

Grupės nariai:
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ANNEX. VILNIUS GEDIMINAS TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT

VILNIAUS GEDIMINO TECHNIKOS UNIVERSITETAS

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Studijų kokybės vertinimo centrui,	2014-03-14	Nr. *36 – 10.3 – 4223*
A. Goštauto g. 12, LT-01108 Vilnius	Į	Nr.

REGARDING THE VILNIUS GEDIMINAS TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY REVIEW REPORT

With regard to the preliminary institutional review report of Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VGTU), we would like to thank the review team on behalf of VGTU community for the atmosphere in the meetings that was open to discussions and exchange of opinions, as well as valuable insights and recommendations.

After having got acquainted with the preliminary review report of the external evaluation of 3-5 December 2013 we would like to make the following comments (following the order of conclusions in the review report):

The statement made by the experts that the public body status does not allow the disposal of assets (par. 8) is not accurate: the Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania allows universities for the ownership right to real and personal (movable) property, restrictions being in place only for the disposal of real estate property.

The 10-year plans mentioned by the review team (par. 17) were not being developed in the University during the self-evaluation period nor they are now: only short-term (1 and 3 year) and mid-term (7 year) plans are applied in strategic management as required by the national strategic planning methodology.

The decrease in student number in Lithuania due to demographic changes and the challenges arising for the University due to negative change of the dynamics of high school graduates were given quite a bit emphasis in the self-evaluation report and during the meetings with the review panel. However, we think, that the recommendation (par. 8, 24) does not reflect the efforts and achievements of the University regarding the management of this issue. The compliance of study program portfolio to the national needs was evaluated positively by the experts, as well as work with schools, publicity of university academic and research achievements are an integral part of the student information and recruitment system; although the number of state-funded study places has been decreasing considerably since 2008, the decline of student number in the University was 10% lower than the overall decline of the country during the respective period. This shows that this issue is systematically addressed in the University, and that the measures focused on the student recruitment are effective.

The note concerned with the gender equality in forming university management bodies (par. 28) is contradicting the institutional staff policy, based on which, all the members of university community are subject to general qualification requirements and the requirement regarding the occupation, any direct or indirect limitations of the rights due to gender, race, religion, and belief are prohibited.

In response to the recommendation (par. 66) regarding the necessity of agreements for the implementation of joint study programmes, we are hereby informing that during the visit of review panel two types of documents were submitted: a memorandum of understanding of the intended joint study program, and two partner agreements of already running joint study programmes, this way intending to showcase different stages of joint study programme implementation.

Recommendation of experts regarding the lack of space for student social and cultural activities (par. 80) does not reflect the real situation: facilities for the artistic groups (choir, theatre, orchestra, folk dance group) of the University and the informal student cultural and social activities (contemporary dance group, photography club, tourist club, etc.) cover 768,5 m². VGTU student representative body (excluding the 251,6 m² of offices in different faculties and the central office) is provided with an area of 132,49 m² in a separate building for social activities. The building is located on student campus, Plytines str. 7. Upon demand the practical training bases in Aukstadvaris, Kirdeikiai and Pervalka with the total area of 2438,9 m² as well as any other space or infrastructure unit of the University are used for cultural or social activities.

In response to the recommendation (par. 69) we hereby inform that the coordination of LLL activities is centralised at the institutional level being coordinated since 2007 by the Office of Career and Integration which is the unit of the central administration.

In the evaluation of student mobility (par. 72) it is stated that Erasmus exchange programme for studies has been carried out in the University since 2008, however, it must be clarified that Erasmus exchange programme for studies has been carried out at VGTU since 1989, it was only the placement scheme that started in 2008 within the Erasmus programme.

Having got acquainted with the review report we would like to note that there might have been lack of time and opportunities to present important decisions of University management, that were implemented in 2013, i.e. after the self-evaluation period of 2007-2012. In the self-evaluation report (SER) the analysis was limited by the period of 2007-2012 as well, and this might have determined the conclusions in the review report, stating that a part of important positive changes and achievements in management, research and study processes reorganisation remained unreflected.

We believe that in the process of making new decisions and forming the directions for the University activities the recommendations of the review panel will be adopted as a starting point, and will be positively accepted by the University community, as it happened so during the interviews.

Rector   Alfonsas Daniūnas

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